

# ESEA Flexibility Renewal Summary

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*This overview summarizes the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI's) renewal proposal for ESEA Flexibility as drafted in February, 2015.*

## ESEA Flexibility Waiver Renewal

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) offered states the opportunity to apply for flexibility on certain provisions of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, currently known as NCLB, the No Child Left Behind Act). In exchange for the flexibility, the DPI designed a plan, which was approved in July 2012, to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. Existing waivers expire at the end of the 2014-15 school year. ED is offering states the opportunity to renew their waivers. DPI is applying for a three-year renewal, through the 2017-18 school year.

In order to receive the initial waiver, states needed to demonstrate their commitment, plans, and progress in the following areas:

- ❖ College- and career-ready expectations for all students
- ❖ State-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support
- ❖ Support for effective instruction and leadership
- ❖ Reduced duplication and unnecessary burden

The waiver renewal process does not call for states to make major revisions to their initial applications, but rather, to continue and deepen efforts begun under their approved waivers. Below are the specific questions asked by ED in the waiver renewal document and a summary of the updates that DPI is providing to ED.

### *Principle 1: College and Career-Ready Expectations for All Students*

*In its request for renewal of ESEA flexibility, each state must update its currently approved ESEA flexibility request to describe how it will continue to ensure all students graduate from high school ready for college and a career, through implementation of college- and career-ready standards and high-quality aligned assessments (general, alternate, and English language proficiency), including how the state will continue to support all students, including English Learners, students with disabilities, low-achieving students, and economically disadvantaged students, and teachers of those students.*

DPI will continue full statewide implementation of college- and career-ready standards for all learners as specified in State Superintendent Evers' Agenda 2017.

In the next phase of our work with schools and districts, we will continue to ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and careers, through implementation of college- and career-ready standards and high-quality aligned assessments. The 2014-15 school year marks the culmination of initial implementation planning on a variety of major initiatives in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System was implemented statewide for both principals and teachers this year. High-quality assessments based on college- and career-ready standards for students in Grades 3-11 are being administered for the first time. DPI is also highlighting strategies to close achievement gaps through the Promoting Excellence for All initiative.

While sights have been set on the 2014-15 school year for some time, this year really represents—not a final destination—but a stop on the pathway to improving outcomes for all students. Our work continues. The implementation of the Academic Career Planning (ACP) process is well underway. An important part of Wisconsin's statewide system of support is the suite of WISE (Wisconsin Information System for Education) tools, implementation of which is well underway. Our continuing work also includes coordinated efforts to focus and

align grants, school improvement efforts, and monitoring to strategically assist schools and districts while minimizing duplicative requests that distract schools from the important work of improving student learning.

## *Principle 2: Develop and Implement a State-Based System of Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support*

### *2.A. Develop and implement a State-based system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support*

Wisconsin's initial Flexibility Request provided an opportunity for the state to implement new initiatives, policies, and practices to meet the goals of improving instruction and student outcomes within an environment that recognizes that each school and district exists within unique circumstances and exhibits unique strengths and weaknesses that should be considered as part of any improvement planning. By moving beyond the uniform, one-size-fits-all policies of NCLB, Wisconsin was able to implement a differentiated accountability system. Wisconsin's state accountability system – namely the annual and district report cards – is based on key priority areas and critical indicators of student engagement, and accompanying recognition, interventions, and support.

This work continues. Wisconsin remains fully committed to providing an accurate, meaningful, and fair flashlight to schools, districts, and the public so that they may better understand and target ongoing improvements in student, school, and district outcomes. The school and district report cards are one way to highlight and better understand school performance. Description of our state report cards is not provided in this renewal request because Wisconsin's state accountability system exists separately from our federal accountability structures. The state also maintains its highly ambitious Annual Measurable Objectives. It continues to identify high-performing and high-progress schools, as well as schools whose performance beats the odds in our state. Title I Priority and Title I Focus school supports and interventions continue, but with more directed support at the district level allowing districts to apply systematic and systemic changes as necessary.

### *2.D. **Priority Schools:** How will the state ensure increased rigor of interventions and supports in Priority schools that have not exited Priority status?*

Wisconsin will continue its efforts to improve low-achieving schools, working at the state, district, and school levels. DPI recognizes that the continued alignment of state, district and school reform efforts is necessary to ensure that these systems of support affect change in low-achieving schools.

In order to increase the rigor and efficacy of interventions for schools that do not exit Priority status after four years, DPI will focus on building capacity at both the district and school levels. Informed by evidence from the implementation of previous statewide reforms, as well as the monitoring processes applicable to those grants, DPI understands that simply directing interventions at the school level may not result in improving student outcomes if policies and practices at the district level either create barriers to, or do not explicitly support, the required reforms. As such, DPI will require any district with Priority schools that do not exit after four years to:

- Assess and strengthen the district's capacity to support its Priority Schools effectively, and
- Develop and submit a plan that addresses how these schools will be provided stable, qualified leadership; how they will be offered coordinated professional development, technical assistance and related support; and how the district will address any opportunity gaps that exist in these schools.

These steps will help to ensure reforms are implemented in the most efficient and effective manner, while developing the local capacity of the district to sustain reforms after initial implementation.

### *2.E. **Focus Schools:** How will the state ensure increased rigor of interventions and supports in Focus schools that have not exited Focus status?*

If a school does not exit Focus School status following four years of interventions and supports, DPI will require more prescriptive school improvement plans. Specific requirements for staff training will address student

interventions, assessments, and instructional methods that directly align to findings from ongoing review and are consistent with needs identified in performance data for targeted student subgroups.

In addition, each continuing Focus School must develop and submit a plan to DPI via an approved, online school improvement planning, tracking, and reporting tool. The plan must explicitly address each of the proven, research-based strategies identified by the Promoting Excellence for All task force:

- Effective Instruction
- Student-Teacher Relationships
- Family and Community Involvement
- School and Instructional Leadership

The emphasis of the Focus School plan will be to organize professional development and other related activities around these four strategic areas. The approach provides a laser focus on closing achievement gaps in the classroom and school, and builds important connections with families.

DPI will also increase interventions at the district level. Each district with a Focus school that has not exited after four years must strengthen its support to the school(s) with specific focus on the closure of achievement gaps. The district must designate at least one district-level staff member to serve as a point of contact between the district and DPI, in order to coordinate professional development and technical assistance to its continuing Focus School(s). By providing district-level support in coordinating state, district, and school initiatives, continuing Focus Schools may focus their attention on improving the quality of instruction and student achievement.

DPI will monitor continuing Focus Schools and their districts through quarterly reviews of their plans, and as necessary, onsite visits.

*2.F. **Other Title I Schools:** In its renewal request, each state must update its plan for providing incentives and supports to other Title I schools to include a clear and rigorous process for ensuring that districts provide interventions and supports for low-achieving students in those schools when one or more subgroups miss either AMOs or graduation rate targets or both over a number of years.*

DPI has a statewide system of support for all Title I schools and will continue to engage with all Title I schools on the best strategies to raise achievement, improve school outcomes, and close achievement gaps.

Recognizing that the education of our students of color requires swift, targeted, and deliberate attention, State Superintendent Tony Evers convened a task force which published a report of classroom and building strategies that have successfully helped to close gaps in Wisconsin. The report and accompanying launch of the Promoting Excellence for All website provides information and strategies successfully used by Wisconsin educators to raise achievement of students of color, closing the gap between them and their peers. These schools represent all grade levels, urban, rural, and suburban settings. The Promoting Excellence for All website will be updated on an ongoing basis with additional resources to help all Wisconsin schools close achievement gaps.

An important part of Wisconsin's statewide system of support is the suite of WISE tools. These tools and processes support schools in improving student outcomes. These currently include:

- **WISEdash Public Portal**, a data reporting portal that uses "dashboards," or visual collections of graphs and tables, to provide multi-year education data about Wisconsin schools. As a public reporting tool, WISEdash can be used by districts, schools, parents, researchers, media, and other community members to view and analyze data published by DPI.
- **WISEdash for Districts**, a secure version of WISEdash that allows authorized staff to drill into the data displayed on the dashboards in order to examine student-level performance in addition to school and district data publicly available.

- **WISExplore**, a process and accompanying resources that guide educators through an ongoing, rigorous, and relevant process of data inquiry.

***2.G. Build State, District and School Capacity to Improve Student Outcomes:** each state must describe its statewide strategy to support and monitor district implementation of the State's system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support, including the state's process for holding districts accountable for improving school and student performance.*

In collaboration with the 12 regional cooperative educational service agencies (CESAs), the Title I Network provides increased access to technical assistance and professional development for Title I districts and schools. With financial support from DPI, each CESA provides free or reduced-cost Title I services designed to increase student outcomes and close the achievement gap for all school districts in their CESA.

Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, DPI rolled out a new Consolidated ESEA Application designed to generate greater transparency while reducing burden at the state and local levels related to the application and claiming process. This process has undergone additional improvements, combining IDEA and ESEA application portals for additional reduction of burden and more comprehensive fiscal monitoring. Consultants have greater access to district and school data that inform conversations with districts regarding areas of identified academic and instructional needs, as well as their subsequent plans for use of ESEA funds to support school and district improvements in these areas.

DPI has implemented an annual resource inventory process to ensure that all Priority and Focus schools will be able to fund required interventions. If the resource inventory process indicates that Priority and Focus schools will have sufficient funds to implement required interventions, then additional 1003(a) funding will be allocated to LEAs. 1003(a) funds allocated to LEAs will provide interventions and supports for low-achieving students in other Title I schools when one or more subgroups miss either AMOs or graduation rate targets or both.

### *Principle 3: Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership*

*Each state must detail the progress made to date in ensuring that each district is on track to implement high-quality teacher and principal evaluation and support systems designed to support educators and improve instruction; and the steps the state will take to ensure continuous improvement of evaluation and support systems that result in instructional improvement and increased student learning.*

The primary purpose of the Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System (EE System) is to develop a system of continuous improvement of educator practice—from pre-service through service—that leads to improved student learning. In 2014-15, Wisconsin implemented the EE System statewide in accordance with Principle 3 of the ESEA Flexibility waiver and Wisconsin law. In addition to implementing the required system, DPI will continue to build a responsive system that is meaningful to Wisconsin educators who are active participants in the system – this is the Wisconsin Way. We continue this work with our vision at the core:

*Every child in every community deserves excellent classroom teachers and building leaders. Every educator deserves a specific, individualized roadmap to help move his or her students and professional practice from Point A to Point B. The Wisconsin EE System serves as that roadmap. The System improves teacher and principal evaluation systems to provide educators with more meaningful feedback and support so they can achieve maximum results with students.*

Although Wisconsin has fully implemented the statewide EE System, DPI is committed to ongoing improvement of the EE System, and relies most of all on educator feedback for such improvements. DPI employs numerous methods of communication and outreach to gather educator feedback, but also to inform principals and teachers about the Wisconsin's EE System, including an EE Twitter feed, EE blog, RSS feed, and comprehensive professional learning modules that educators can view on demand, regional trainings as well as working groups that meet regularly and include teachers and principals.